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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003610

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SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT IRAQI SHI'A MP DISCUSSES FEDERALISM,
SHI'A COALITION, AND JAM WITH CHARGE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel Speckhard for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Independent Council of Representatives (CoR) Shia coalition (UIC) member Qassim Daoud told the Charge on September 23 that the role of the central government needed to be strengthened and that region formation should be delayed until the appropriate capacities are in place. He argued against a broad-scale military operation to curb militias, making clear at the same time his opinion that the best way to deal with the Sadrists was to eliminate Muqtada Al-Sadr. Daoud offered some details on his efforts to form a secular or centrist party within the UIC, but said that the timeline for launching the party had been delayed. END SUMMARY.

Federalism and the Center

¶2. (C) Turning initially to the related issues of federalism and constitutional review, Daoud told the Charge that the role of the central government needed to be strengthened. While stating that he agreed with federalism in principle, Daoud argued that it should not be implemented until the necessary governance institutions are developed and said he had proposed an amendment to the draft law on regions that would mandate a "capacity building" period of three to five years after a request to form a region before it could be brought to the voters in a referendum. Daoud characterized the Shia Coalition's SCIRI and Badr as "pro-federalism in an extreme way" but noted that SCIRI's Coalition partners Dawa and Fahila, as well as Prime Minister Maliki, had concerns about federalism. The Sadrists, he continued, "are difficult to work with" on the issue of federalism. Daoud added that several areas of ambiguity in the constitution had to be resolved in order to strengthen the central government, using the issue of division of oil revenues as an example.

Dealing with JAM and Muqtada Al-Sadr

¶3. (C) Asked by the Charge what solution he envisioned to the challenges posed by militias, Daoud stated that major military operations against militias would "complicate the security situation even in what we call the secure south." Daoud agreed with the Charge that multinational and Iraqi forces needed to combat those militia cells involved in death squad activities and other crimes. Turning to Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM), Daoud claimed that "Muqtada does not control the JAM." He characterized the JAM as divided into at least three groups: "criminals and Baathists," led by a man known as Abu al-Dira; "an extreme element," close to Iran and led by Qays al-Khuz'ali; and

"low-class people who believe Muqtada has holy bones in his body." Daoud claimed that al-Dira's group operated the death squads, killing mostly Sunnis but on occasion Shi'a as well; several of his Shi'a bodyguards had recently been captured and tortured by al-Dira's group, Daoud said. He described the Sadrist movement as "a shallow, fragile, one-man movement without an ideology." Noting again his belief that a major military operation against the JAM would lead to greater instability, Daoud argued that the best way to deal with the Sadrist movement was to "eliminate Muqtada from Iraq" (i.e., kill him).

A Party for Secular Shi'a?

¶4. (C) The Charge then asked Daoud about the status of a new political party Daoud had previously mentioned intending to form. Noting that secular Shi'a were not represented in the UIC, Daoud characterized his plan as "forming a party of the center," though not calling it a "secular" party. He said that Ayatollah Sistani agreed with this plan because "he sees that the competent people are all secularists." Daoud noted that he had planned to launch the new party in September, but that he had not been able to hold the necessary meetings before Ramadan. He said that in the coming months he planned to invite 300 to 400 prominent people from the provinces to several meetings "to help them feel that they are part of the process" of forming the new party.

Comment

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¶5. (C) Daoud has several times mentioned his intention to form a secular party within the Shi'a coalition. While his vision for this party is consistent, the timeline keeps slipping. He did not mention how he planned to finance the party, nor was his strategy for soliciting support from provincial figures convincing.
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